





LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

public authority in the United States, with the pure heifer-lymph obtained from the establishment of Dr. Martin of Roxbury, Massachusetts; and having myself visited it, I can testify to the conscientious care with which the purest lymph is there supplied. There have, on the other hand, been some most severe—even fatal—cases of purulent infection, which were traced to the employment (from motives of economy) of vaccine matter supplied from another source, which proved, on microscopic examination, to be charged with pus-corpuscles.—The moral of this is obvious.

I now commend these recent experiences to the attentive consideration of those, with whom rests the grave responsibility of deciding whether, under the guidance of Mr. P. A. Taylor, and in opposition to the general voice of the Medical Profession, they will *undo* a system, under which the death-rate from Small-pox is shown by Mr. Taylor's own Table—still more by the corresponding Table for Scotland—to have undergone such an enormous reduction; and which has restrained within narrow limits a small Epidemic whose virulence among the unprotected populations of Borneo, the Gold Coast, and Madagascar (as attested by recent Consular reports) shows it to be no less deadly than that which ravaged most of the countries of Europe in 1614 even more destructively than the Plague.

Although Mr. P. A. Taylor treated my former assertion of this virulence as *invented* on the part of the advocates of Vaccination, in order to cover its failure, I trust that the intelligence of your House will see that it is fully borne out by the additional facts which have now adduced from authoritative sources.

I remain, Dear DR. PLAYFAIR,

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM B. CARPENTER.

LONDON,

April 23, 1883.

THE GOVERNMENT OF LONDON

BY
W. M. TORRENS, M.P.

REPRINTED, BY PERMISSION, FROM
"THE NINETEENTH CENTURY"

LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1884

THE GOVERNMENT OF LONDON.

AUTHENTIC history furnishes no parallel to the increase of wealth and population in the valley of the Thames during the present century. The metropolis has never been recognized in law as one town, and its boundaries have never been fixed by enactment or custom. In every direction outside the City gates, dwellings, at first sparsely, then thickly, and at last densely, have risen up, until the parishes "without the walls" and "in the fields" have become as fully peopled as Bishopsgate or Eastcheap.

In 1831 the metropolis of the census comprised 78,029 acres from Hampstead to Wandsworth, and from Stepney to Fulham—fifteen miles by twelve. In 1851, civic and suburban London contained 305,933 dwellings, and more than two millions of people with ratable property assessed at £9,964,343 a year. Since then the number of habitations has not, indeed, kept pace with that of property or population, but has increased twenty-five per cent., while these have more than doubled. Such an aggregation of intelligent and active communities, possessed of so much opulence, yet restless with so many wants, nowhere else exists in Christendom. How comes it, then, that nowhere else is urban life so inorganic, that nowhere else are the thews and sinews of local rule developed so imperfectly? A quarter of a century has elapsed since the first attempt was made to reduce to anything like uniformity of system the local institutions of London. Without the semblance of ground-plan, unity of design, or bond of cohesion, several great towns had grown up contiguously on either bank of the Thames between Battersea and Blackwall.

Westminster and Southwark had defined boundaries, having time out of mind sent representatives to Parliament. By the Reform Act of 1832 five new boroughs were formed out of the remainder, and two representatives were assigned to each. The City alone possessed corporate privileges and civic organization, while outside its ambit lay a confused and anomalous wilderness of parochial jurisdictions and extra-parochial liberties, whimsically unequal in their scope and tenor, and frequently irreconcilable in their pretensions and powers. The attempt to describe the chaos that prevailed reads now like an incredible fiction. Three hundred different bodies, under various appellations and with the utmost diversity of functions, claimed the right by prescriptive usage, or by modern acts passed from time to time, to impose local rates for various purposes. No fewer than 10,448 individuals as vestrymen, commissioners, guardians, members of manorial courts, and magistrates of quarter sessions were engaged in daily contention, carried on at the public cost, about the right to do all that required to be locally done, and how *not* to do it. Streets were unpaved, rights of way were disputed, whole regions lay in darkness by night, unswept and unwatered by day.

Commissioners of Sewers, many of them named *ex officio*, possessed but ill-defined jurisdiction, which they exercised in general so negligently and at times so arbitrarily, that as a desperate remedy their number was reduced from upwards of a thousand to twenty-three, and subsequently to eleven. Their character for efficiency, however, did not mend, and parochial wags affected to believe that their real function was that of accumulation—not dispersion—of nuisances, especially in the article of debt.

Diversities in the mode of choosing vestrymen and requiring parochial officers naturally arose from the wide discrepancies of situation, ways of life, and other special circumstances in busy communities, practically remote from one another from want of leisure, curiosity, and facilities of cheap locomotion; and within reasonable bounds these disparities would have mattered little. In Hackney no one was qualified who dwelt not in a house valued at £40 a year; and Bloomsbury was so genteel that no man, however good his trade, was allowed to serve if he let any part of his house in



lodgings. Shadwell, more dependent upon weekly wages, thought £10 a qualification high enough; while Poplar distrusted any whose respectability fell short of £30; but Mile End had confidence in the proof that £12 rental gave of integrity, and St. George's-in-the-East had faith in a rating of £1 4s. How far these amounts might be qualified or accounted for by dissimilarity in the standard of valuation which each parish formed for itself, it would puzzle an antiquary now to discover. More serious was the mischief arising from the multiplication of paving and lighting boards, especially in parishes whose confines interlapped from ecclesiastical causes long forgotten. Seven different bodies belonging to St. Clement's, St. Mary's, the Savoy, and St. Martin's, divided among them the duty of keeping open the highway from Charing Cross to Temple Bar, and by their neighbourly jealousies added in no slight degree to the impediments of the journey. In Westminster, the line of delimitation was generally drawn down the centre of the street, an infallible receipt for partial stoppage twice as often in the year as would otherwise have been avoidable. Sometimes the roadway belonged to one board, the pathway to another, and the lighting to a third, while as a climax the watering on the right hand was always done in the morning, and on the left hand after sunset, insuring to the inhabitants of both the benefit of dust throughout the day. It fared even worse with the inhabitants of large growing parishes in the suburbs. As each additional estate was let on long lease for building, a local act was promoted by the influential vendor, which nobody took the trouble to oppose; and its clauses invariably provided for the full autonomy of the new district, utterly regardless of how it might affect those that lay contiguous, or the luckless portions lying between. In St. Pancras, sixteen independent boards "did the paving and lighting under, and by, virtue of the enactment in such cases duly made and provided;" and forasmuch as the said enactments took no cognizance of the adjacent or intervening localities, and conferred no right of taxing them, their inhabitants were left wholly unprovided for. Combining in revolt, they made three attempts to obtain a general act for the parish, but private rights and privileges proved too strong for them; and, after paying their costs, they succumbed in despair.

The aged and infirm poor were driven from the parish their labour had helped to enrich, to some other that knew them not, forthwith to be bundled out again. To the generation that has come to maturity under a different state of things, that which some of us are old enough to remember seems almost inconceivable.

In June, 1852, a Royal Commission, consisting of Mr. Labouchere, Mr. Justice Patteson, and Sir G. Cornwall Lewis, was appointed to inquire into the state of the Corporation of the City, and to collect information respecting its constitution and government, and regarding the property, revenues, and expenditure of the same.

By far the weightiest opinions given in evidence before the Commissioners were against a Metropolitan Council for the aggregate towns of the Thames, and "in favour of reforming the old Corporation of the City, and giving a new corporation to each of the surrounding boroughs." To expand the existing central jurisdiction so as to embrace the whole of the urban and suburban area would, in the judgment of Mr. Samuel Morley, be very undesirable. "It would be too large a body a great deal. Each corporation should be confined to the duties of its own locality." Mr. Thomson Hankey gave similar advice as to the need of distributing the duties and localizing the functions of municipal rule; while both advocated the establishment by delegation of a board of works, carrying into effect improvements of exceptional nature and cost. The Commissioners, after duly considering all that could be urged upon the subject, reported unequivocally in confirmation of these views.

To advance the boundaries of the City so as to include the whole of the metropolis "would entirely alter the character of the Corporation of London, and would create a municipal body of unmanageable dimensions. We therefore advise that this course should not be adopted. If it were held that municipal institutions were not suited to a metropolitan city, no reason could be found except its antiquity and existence for maintaining the Corporation of London, even with its present limited area. A metropolitan city, however, requires for its own local purposes municipal institutions not less than other towns. Their utility is indeed greater, and their want more felt, in a large, populous, opulent, and crowded metro-

polis, than in a country town of less size, population, and wealth. Each of the seven parliamentary boroughs contains a larger number of inhabited houses and a larger population than the City; and as the legislature has enfranchised them (by giving them representatives in Parliament), it ought to complete the work by enfranchising them for municipal purposes also. We see no reason why the benefit of municipal institutions should not be extended to the rest of the metropolis, by its division into districts, each possessing a municipal government of its own. We further suggest the creation of a Metropolitan Board of Works, to be composed of a very limited number of members, deputed to it from the council of each metropolitan municipal body, including that of the City; and that the management of the public works in which all have a common interest should be conducted by this body; and we recommend the proceeds of the coal tax be transferred to its administration: that the Board of Works should be empowered to levy a rate upon the entire metropolis for any improvement of general utility, within a certain poundage, to be fixed by Act of Parliament."

Regarding the great circumjacent expanse of urban life, the Commissioners were careful to avoid the lazy error of treating it as a single town. More correctly, as they say, "London may be called a province covered with houses. Its diameter is so great that the persons living at its extremities have few interests in common. The inhabitants of opposite extremities are in general acquainted only with their own quarter, and have no minute knowledge of other parts of the town. Hence, the two first conditions for municipal government would be wanting if the whole of London were placed under a single corporation. The enormous population and the magnitude of the interests under the care of the municipal body would likewise render its administration a work of great difficulty. These considerations appear to us decisive against the expediency of placing the whole of the metropolis under a single corporation, without adverting to those more general questions of public policy which naturally suggest themselves in connection with the subject." But they saw no reason why the benefit of municipal institutions should not be extended to the rest of the metropolis by its division into districts, each possessing a corporate government of its own.

Here, then, is the impartial and deliberate judgment of a Commission consisting of one of the best judges who ever sat on the common law bench, and two of the most respected ministers who ever held the seals of Secretary of State ; men thoroughly read in the constitutional history of their country, and thoroughly versed in the administration of its affairs. Given habitually to deal with facts and necessities as they presented themselves, and deeply impressed with the conviction that the soundest legislation is that which recognizes the natural developments of society and promotes its spontaneous tendencies to organization, they put aside with judicial gravity fantastical suggestions for erecting an unwieldy and ill-proportioned system, which they clearly saw would be unmunicipal in its very conception, and unmanageable (save by external influence) should it ever be set in motion. They saw nothing to apprehend in the erection of as many corporations as there were boroughs in the valley of the Thames ; they saw everything to warn us against making the experiment of one. In 1853 two millions of people seemed to them palpably too many to be fitly or safely represented in a single town council. What would they say were they with us now and heard the proposition made of one municipality for four millions ? To them ratable property to the extent of £9,964,318, diverse in every conceivable form and character, seemed infinitely too wide a field for corporate taxation. What would they think of giving over £25,055,674 of ratable property for an assembly in Guildhall or Whitehall to experimentalize upon ?

Their Report was duly presented to both Houses, and met with general approval. Hopes of reviving the project of expansion and inclusion were not altogether laid aside ; and out of doors its advocates kept up a desultory attention, but at Westminster it was crowded out of remembrance by rumours of coming war. Next year there was no time to think of internal reforms of any kind, and it was not until the spring of 1855 that Government decided on carrying into effect some of the recommendations of the Commissioners. The City with its chartered privileges, antique forms, rich endowments, and curious anomalies fiscal and judicial, was respited till a more convenient season ; and the jocose veteran then at the head of affairs continued to be the most favoured

guest of the Sheriffs and Lord Mayor. Neither was anything done to create new corporations where confessedly they were so much wanted, but six and thirty parishes and unions were deemed worthy instead to elect triennial vestries on a uniform plan, to whom were to be committed the care of paving and lighting, removing nuisances, and, when they chose, watering the streets. No magisterial authority was to be conferred upon them, nor even a superintending control over gas and water supply. The most important privilege with which they were to be endowed was that of choosing members of a Metropolitan Board who should regulate in future the main drainage and the making of great thoroughfares in the metropolis. But the evils of neglect had been suffered to exist so long, and the inorganic helplessness of dissociated communities was so paralytic, that neither Government nor Opposition would attempt the difficult, and in a party sense the thankless, task of trying to inform them with the higher spirit of municipal life.

Had the framing of a measure for municipalizing London been confided in 1855 to a statesman imbued with constitutional learning and feeling, the materials lay ready to his hand ; and impediments there were really none. The Report of the Commission had cleared the site and given the ground plan for a great and suitable design in harmony with the best traditions of the realm, and capable alike of local expansion and of federal adaptation. The patient and pondering mind of Sir G. C. Lewis, full of the wisdom that comes of youth spent in study, and of manhood disciplined by experience in administrative life, would have set about methodically building up municipalities on either side of the Thames, fitted to satisfy all that was best in middle-class ambition, and to save so many great and growing communities from liability to the alternate reproach of unpatriotic apathy and fitful yielding to the passion or delusion of the hour. His was emphatically a mind given to organization ; but by temper and conviction he was averse from the introduction of more of novelty than could be helped, having regard to the progress of society and the growth of the time. He thought the duty of a loyal and liberal legislator was to follow a good precedent wherever he could find it, and to restore what had been lost by decay or lapse ; content to improve rather than eager to invent, to

consolidate and elevate rather than startle by some new device, to underpin, enlarge, and copy with improvement rather than subvert to make room for the transcript of some foreign design. When he had to build anew, he preferred to build upon old English lines, and to construct so that his legislative work should be in keeping as far as possible with what had gone before. Municipal corporations, independent and powerful, were, he saw, peculiarly wanted to redeem from political incontinuity and social nervelessness the communities around the seat of government : and the fact that they were passive and dumb for the most part was to him the strongest proof of all that they needed institutions whose working would impart the sense of healthful and active citizenship. But he had not the drawing of the Bill, and the opportunity was lost. Sir Benjamin Hall, whose constituents had for some time been urging him to obtain for them some remedy for the anomalies and inequalities of their local condition, readily undertook to play the part of godfather to a scheme modelled on that of Paris,* and which probably would never have been proposed, and certainly would not have been carried, but for an unanticipated nuisance which had rapidly grown intolerable in Westminster, not in Marylebone ; in the City, not in Mayfair.

Notwithstanding the rapid increase of building for domestic and manufacturing purposes on both sides of the river, it had long preserved its early character for clearness and salubrity. Little heed was taken by its easy-going Conservators of the gradual substitution of steamboats for tardier means of transport, or of the increasing refuse from noxious traders, and the outfall from deleterious factories. The quickness of the current when the tide went down, and its supposed cleansing power when it rose, served for an answer to the fastidious who grumbled, or the hypochondriacal who refused to be comforted when told that the fish were as lively as yesterday and yet more abundant. But when science began to be practically applied to the health of dwellings, and to the development of husbandry, unfair advantage was taken of the accommodating stream.

Every year agricultural drainage and urban drainage more and more troubled its flow, until at last, during the hot

* Mr. Mackinnon, debate on Bill, May 14, 1855.

summer of 1854, the members of both Houses grew personally alarmed at the stench that invaded their halls of conference whenever the tide happened to rise during the afternoon. How long the unhappy dwellers from Lambeth to Wapping Old Stairs might have sniffed and sickened without a remedy for the mischief, or without measures being taken to cleanse the polluted current, had it not been for the consternation which providentially fell on the three estates of the realm, in Parliament assembled, Heaven only knows. But day after day, when Tory peers and Radical commoners grew equally uncomfortable, when committees found it difficult to make up a quorum, and advocates declared that if the windows were not kept shut they could not go on; when squires once rubicund showed the white feather, and dyspeptic officials muffled their nostrils with handkerchiefs steeped in eau de Cologne, there came about a general agreement that the Thames must be somehow washed clean, and that the quicker the method the better, whatever the cost or form. Arterial drains for the whole metropolis, whereby all sewage should be diverted from the river and carried underground to the sea, were declared to be indispensable, and a metropolitan authority must be constituted to carry into effect the operation. Nothing short of a general rate would suffice for an undertaking so vast; but statistics were not wanting to convince Bloomsbury and Tyburnia that they too were interested in its completion. Not only in ill-built suburbs and overcrowded quarters of the town, but in many whose high rents guaranteed their gentility, numberless dwellings were to be found without any description of sewerage. An instance was given by the President of the Board of Health of a street containing seventy first-class houses, of which but two had any communication with the main sewer: and out of three hundred and sixty thousand inhabited dwellings, nearly one-half were said to be similarly circumstanced.

As every district was thus supposed to be equally interested, all should be equally represented; and as the difficulty and costliness of the enterprise demanded that men of known probity and judgment should compose the new Council, resort was had to the method of indirect or double election. A vestry or board should be elected by the rated householders for each large parish or union of small parishes,

and when elected the thirty-six vestries should nominate respectively members of the central or executive board. It saved trouble to take the poor-law divisions as they then existed ; and the minister in an off-hand way put aside the alternative of incorporating parliamentary boroughs upon the unarguable plea that they were too large. Size must be always a question of comparison ; and it was obvious to the least informed of those who listened to the objection that it would apply as well to the great cities of Yorkshire and Lancashire as to those of Middlesex and Surrey ; and this whether population or ratable property was taken as the test, or the two combined.

Lord Ebrington, Mr. Pellatt, and Mr. Williams, on behalf of their constituents in Southwark, Lambeth, and Marylebone, expressed their disapproval of cutting up the town into thirty-six divisions, termed in a passing way municipal, but which were really invested with no adequate municipal functions. The aggregate expenditure of such a system, they argued, would inevitably prove greater than that of seven or eight corporate bodies entrusted with plenary local authority ; and against the correlative institution of a central board with a jurisdiction too wide for practical responsibility either to vestries or ratepayers, they entered more than one energetic protest. Nor were they wholly without support from members unconnected with the metropolis. Lord Barrington, Sir H. Willoughby, Sir F. Thesiger, and Mr. Mackinnon, looking at the matter impartially, discerned in the proposed measure the elements of weakness and evil likely to result from an abandonment of the time-honoured principle of local self-rule. Indirect election was an outlandish novelty, they said, which implied lack of faith in the spirit of native institutions ; still worse was the jealous stipulation embodied in a clause giving to the Crown the right to name a chairman at £2000 a year, to which Sir W. Jolliffe shrewdly objected that its certain effect would be to enfeeble if not extinguish the sense of responsibility in the unpaid members of the board. The closest friends of Government staggered at this overweening effort to create another permanent and lucrative place, and at the instance of Lord R. Grosvenor it was struck out of the Bill. It is not unworthy of note that Sir G. C. Lewis, his wiser judgment being overruled by his colleagues in the

Cabinet, remained throughout obdurately mute, and that during the oft-renewed discussion of details not a sentence of approval is recorded from the lips of Sir J. Graham, Mr. Cobden, Mr. Bright, Mr. Disraeli, or Mr. Gladstone. In the Lords, more than one grave misgiving found utterance, but no division took place. Lord Derby objected to a compulsory rule of uniformity in the mode of electing members of the central board, preferring that the traditional usages of each district should be allowed a salutary freedom of choice: he cited as an example the senate of the American Union, each of whose states was guaranteed by the Federal pact the right to nominate its two representatives in the way it thought best, and not according to any arbitrary method to which it had been unaccustomed. Practically there was true wisdom in permitting a diversity which would enable them to try by the experience of comparison what was the best method of selection. But grinding to a level was the order of the day, and without further alteration the measure became law.

The central Board of Works, called into existence by the Act of 1855, was destined to falsify many of the predictions hazarded regarding it. Allowed to choose its own chairman, and to make bye-laws for its own procedure, it wisely eschewed from the outset every pretension to guide or govern public opinion in questions not strictly within its province. The fewness of its members contributed greatly to form and to confirm the habit of adhering closely to matters of business, and treating every proposed deviation from the plain track of duty, not only as a waste of time to be reprehended, but a breach of order to be resisted peremptorily and without debate. A numerous assembly, however chosen, would have been more easily beguiled into philanthropic platitude, suggestive illustration, plausible digression, and at length undisguised rhetoric. In its exemplary abstinence, under all temptations to sin in these respects, the Metropolitan Board has consistently proved itself worthy of all praise. Breaking with the traditions of failure that encompassed its immediate predecessor, the Commission of Sewers, it set about the great work of arterial drainage specifically assigned to it, and carried the enterprise to completion within a reasonable time. That done, it undertook the northern embankment of the Thames,

beyond compare the noblest improvement in the realm accomplished during the present century. Diligent, persevering, and ambitious, it has gained a position amongst us more influential, undoubtedly, than any other institution of our time. The formation of great thoroughfares, and the widening of overcrowded streets, proceeded more tardily than impatience could be made to understand ; for it is not so easy to do great good as those may imagine who have never had the opportunity to try.

Compulsory expropriation of property in towns is about the most invidious and expensive duty which a public body can be set to perform. It is morally impossible to guard it effectually from being made conducive to personal gain in a subordinate degree ; hopeless to save it from the imputation of furtive and base motives in those who are concerned in promoting it. Berkeley House has not been proof against the pitiless gusts of scandal that intermittently sweep over society, maiming reputations that seemed to have strength of stem and depth of root enough to withstand them while passing harmlessly over the willows that offer no resistance to their rage. Additional powers have from time to time been conceded by Parliament, which, far from satisfying, seem only to have stimulated the Board's desire for more : until the conviction has become general that it has already quite as much on hand as it can well do. Hence the signal unanimity in rejecting an elaborate scheme two years ago, by which it expected confidently to be enabled to buy out or supersede the existing water companies, and thus enormously to increase its authority and patronage.

Mutual jealousies at first existed between it and the City. But the sagacity of youth and the shrewdness of age gradually came to understand each other. Reciprocal hospitalities and courtesies led by degrees to interchange of confidence, and at length good understanding. Each has found more than enough to do advantageously, without infringing the domain of the other. Occasionally it still happens that their pretensions clash ; and in the newspapers, or the lobby, there are now and then passages of arms, that to the uninitiated look like the outbreak of repressed hostility : but next day the credulous of quarrel learn that all has been arranged, and that the prospect of civic war "is barren all from Dan to Beer-

sheba." As contrasted with the aggregate power and work of the vestries, it is perhaps enough to note that while the total outlay by the latter is about two millions and a half, the expenditure of the Board last year was £3,341,592, of which above two millions was supplied by loan chargeable on future rates. The funded debt of the metropolis, after deducting assets, is now £11,665,047, which has been raised on easy terms, and without which, or an intolerable increase of present taxation, it would have been impossible to attempt works so varied and so vast as those we have seen completed. The true check upon indefinite and improvident expansion of the funded debt will be found in adherence to the legitimate limits originally assigned to the Board; and which its best friends will ever deprecate any temptation to overpass. It was not set up to compete with public money in speculative or commercial undertakings with joint-stock companies, still less to agglomerate such as already exist for the making of gas, the supply of water, the organization of traffic, or the dealing in any other want or commodity for the public at large. Once entered on the illimitable field of money-making enterprise, the temptation to mortgage the resources of the future would be irresistible, whenever plausible invention or the glittering promise of unprecedented profit should happen to mislead the majority for the time being. For public trustees it is bad enough to compete with private capitalists; to take over their investment and goodwill and risk, without the preservative check of direct self-interest, is infinitely worse. The great body of metropolitan ratepayers, though they watch jealously the augmentation of liabilities incurred in their name, do not grudge what they recognize as fairly within the proper province of the Board. In May, 1879, there was a further issue of consolidated stock to the extent of £2,150,000, which, owing to the credit at which it stood in the market, realized £2,181,451; and why? Because it was understood that "this money was applicable only to special improvements and other purposes sanctioned by Parliament: toll bridges, £500,000; Artisans' Dwellings, £300,000; street improvements, £787,000; loans to local authorities, £538,000; and the remainder for the fire brigade and open spaces." *

* Annual Report of the Metropolitan Board of Works for 1879, p. 98.

The central authority has in fact become the banker of the local boards, as well as the arbiter between them and any of their constituents who may think themselves aggrieved. Its other administrative functions are diversified and important, and their discharge, notwithstanding the activity of an efficient staff, is oftentimes extremely onerous. It would be vain to expect that eligible and independent men would be found to perform the executive duties now laid upon them in the way they ought to be fulfilled, if in addition thereto were super-added those of daily municipal government, or the far less compatible cares of any great commercial enterprise. Representative centralism, thus expanded beyond its natural bounds and proportions, would degenerate into a clumsy and dangerous motive power of functionaryism which it must keep in motion, but which it could have no power to direct or control. The same objection to a great extent applied to any hybrid board formed of delegates from Berkeley House and Guildhall to superintend, for they could not administer, in the true sense of the term, any of the great concerns in which the inhabitants of the metropolis at large are interested.

Upon the vestries and district boards devolved, under the Act of 1855 and successive statutes, the paving, cleansing, and lighting of streets, house drainage, repression of nuisances, intra-parochial improvements, inspection of bakehouses, dairies, drinking fountains, common lodging-houses, free libraries, artisans' dwellings, baths and washhouses, mortuaries, places for disinfection of furniture or clothing, analysis of food, and the care of gardens and open spaces ; and for the carrying out of these manifold duties, powers of borrowing from public or private sources subject to the veto of the Metropolitan Board were legally conferred. It would have been miraculous, considering the wide disparity of condition in the communities out of which these primary schools of self-government were formed, and the utterly dissimilar proportion which their varied duties bore to one another in different places, if they had been found equally efficient or blameless. In the mere rate of expenditure and pay of necessary staff there has been, as was to be expected, great diversity, and in some instances startling contrasts. Some vestries availed themselves largely of their borrowing powers, applied the money to incontestably useful purposes, and steadily took measures for promptly and

punctually defraying their obligations. A few, with fainter hearts and a heavier burthen of decent indigence to weigh them down, have been unable financially to follow in their footsteps, and have been afraid to face the difficulties that beset every effort to clear away the decaying haunts of misery, and the substitution of healthful and more civilized habitations. The wear and tear of highways in places of through traffic has proved intolerably expensive; in others it gives nobody a serious thought; and then some blockhead, smitten with the mania for doing sums and statistics, takes out the mileage, population, and ratable property in two metropolitan antipodes, and by a rule of three works out a solemn balance of condemnation against the hard-driven and specious praise of the happy-go-lucky subjects of his contrast. One of the first obligations laid upon each vestry and district board was the inspection of nuisances, and the question of staff for the purpose was disposed of by bureaucratic cynicism with the flippant sarcasm that where nuisances abounded inspectors, it was to be hoped, would especially abound. There was little hesitation in wealthier localities about appointing inspectors at a hundred a year to keep a look-out, as they walked abroad upon their ordinary callings, for any infringement of sanitary rules; and five-sixths of the neighbourhood being occupied with mansions, shrubberies, public institutions, parks, and dwellings of the well-to-do classes, there could not have been much danger of the gentlemen inspectors having too much to do. But not far off, though in a different square of the statutable chess-board where few of these dainty items of ratable property were to be found, the suspicion and savour of nuisance being rife, difficulties arose in getting the right sort of man to be an inspector, and greater difficulties in getting him voted adequate pay. Instances might be named of but one inspector at five and twenty shillings a week in a work-a-day district where two or three would have ample occupation, but where the circumstances that rendered more surveillance needful were exactly those that rendered the local authorities unwillingly parsimonious, prompting them continually to recur to the sad and shabby text of "what is the lowest possible to get the work done for?" Whereupon philosophistry curls its official lip, scornful of the inefficiency of local inspection in the vulgar regions—

“Where men must work and women must weep,
For there's little to earn and many to keep,
And the heart of toil is moaning.”

In general the vestries have been fortunate in the chief clerks whom they have relied on for the management and direction of their business. Many of them have proved themselves to be men of real administrative ability; their office, in no case a sinecure, and sometimes requiring an exemplary degree of temper, integrity, and skill, can in no case be said to be overpaid. It is highly creditable to them that the most prominent amongst them have retained their arduous position for many years, without growing weary of well-doing, or losing the confidence of their variable and varying masters; and without having the stimulus of promotion, which in the civil service of the Crown tends to preserve men past their prime from yielding to the torpor of routine. Such men cannot keep out incursions of unworthy faction or keep down displays of personal hostility and spite, or prevent the perpetration of jobs now and then in small matters, and sometimes in considerable affairs. But Parliament itself has not always escaped the imputation of having been made the instrument of men actuated by selfish motives; and just now it does not behove an assembly chosen by ballot and household suffrage, to have its heart too haughty, or its eyes too lofty, when judging of the subordinate bodies to whom has been committed the management of local affairs. Upon the whole they have not neglected their duty; very rarely can it be said that their prominent members have made merchandise of their functions. In five and twenty years society has materially and mentally undergone many changes, and their position has without any fault of theirs been modified thereby. New powers and influences have risen up or been created by direct intervention of law, all of them contributing to divert public attention, more or less, from parochial assemblies not too strong at the beginning, and now perceptibly less so than they were. In 1855 there was no school board and no penny press, no tramways and no preservation of open spaces for the recreation of the peoples; and these are but some of the universally operative changes that have taken place in metropolitan existence. The tide of life has swollen and shrunk alternately in many ways—what wonder if popular institu-

tions have drifted somewhat from their original moorings? London vestries have for a quarter of a century done an infinity of useful work, and for the most part done it innocuously and unpretentiously. Is it not time that with the training and experience thus acquired a higher degree of duty and responsibility should be set before the worthy and capable men who take the chief part in local business?

After considerable experience of the working of the two-fold system, a select committee was appointed, on the motion of Mr. Ayrton, to inquire into the local government and taxation of London. Its report recommended that the name of the Metropolitan Board should be changed to that of Municipal Council; that the members should be chosen by direct election; that it should have control over the supply of gas and water, and generally exercise the authority of a civic corporation. Meanwhile Mr. J. S. Mill introduced a bill to incorporate the parliamentary boroughs; but before it obtained a second reading it was withdrawn, to make way for a more comprehensive measure, which the member for Westminster laid upon the table at the end of the session. It proposed to create a county of London with a common council of a hundred and seventy-one members and fifty-two aldermen, in whose jurisdiction the separate authorities of Berkeley House and Guildhall should disappear; while subordinate municipalities in the ten cities and boroughs should divide with this new central power the business of local government. Many of its provisions when discussed out of doors provoked opposition; and many vested interests prepared to resist its enactment. When reintroduced in 1868, the representatives of the City succeeded in preventing, by reference to standing orders, the consideration of the clauses that peculiarly affected the privileges of their constituents; and the debate on second reading for the most part related consequently to the other features of the scheme.

Mr. Mill argued that the great danger of democratic institutions was the want of skilled administration, and the great problem of the future was to obtain the combination of the two.

“All the defects of democratic institutions are great in proportion as their area is small, and if you wish them to work well you should never have a representative assembly for a

small area, for if you do, it will be impossible to have skilled administration. There will be much less choice of persons, and those less competent for the task will be willing to undertake the conduct of public affairs. A popular assembly that has only a little work to do tries to transact public business by making speeches, the most ineffective way in which public business can be done. The parochial area is too small for the public to take an interest in what is being done. There is a good deal to be said for having only one municipality for the whole metropolis. But the business to be entrusted to their management would be too great, and it would give them the control of too large an amount of revenue, and it would be useless to attempt to obtain the consent of the House to such a measure. It is better to have local municipal bodies for the different boroughs, and that the central board should not be troubled with any business but such as is common to the whole. The boroughs offer a medium between the small size of an ordinary parish and the inordinate size of the whole metropolis. I therefore ask you to create municipalities for the parliamentary districts which shall exercise their powers under the Municipal Corporation Act, and concentrate the powers of the vestries." *

In a languid House the wise and calm reasoning of Mr. Mill evoked but little response. Some called his plan too complicated, some too crude, ministers declined the responsibility of giving it their support, and the second reading was not pressed to a division. At the dissolution, which soon after ensued, Mr. Mill lost his seat, and in 1869 Mr. C. Buxton undertook the charge of the bill. Further modifications, which had been made to propitiate the City, were not generally regarded as amendments; and a new Home Secretary, engrossed with legislative cares more urgent, prayed for a more convenient season, and promised in the interim a careful reconsideration of the subject. But Parliament is seldom in the mood to undertake laborious changes in existing institutions without some pressing necessity or importunate demand. Theoretic proof of anomalies, however clear, and promises of future benefits, however sanguine, go but a short way towards making a House on a spring afternoon when the weather is fair, or keeping a House during a summer night when the

* J. S. Mill in moving Second Reading, June 17, 1868.

temperature is high. Neither Mr. Buxton, nor after him Lord Elcho, could induce the Government of the day to take up the question ; and so it remained in abeyance, and might still have remained there, but for the threatening of a storm of discontent regarding the supply of water, which, being essentially a practical matter, universally intelligible, people have at length been set thinking how it may best be regulated. In addition to poor rate, local government rate, police rate, school rate, the towns on Thames-side complain that they pay a heavy rate for gas, and an increasing rate, which they feel to be unjust, for water ; and they have come by degrees to comprehend that without some permanent local authority responsible to them and armed with power, if not to control at least sufficient to arbitrate between them and the water companies, improvement in quality or reduction of price they must look for in vain.

For several years discontent had found desultory utterance at the arbitrary increase of charge made by some of the water companies to individual consumers without even a semblance of affording increased supply. The Act for assimilating the parochial standards of valuation was in itself expedient and just, where a common poor fund and other rates had been made permanently chargeable throughout the metropolitan cluster of towns ; but its authors had overlooked the technical sanction it would give to elude the check imposed by existing statute upon augmentation of water rent in a great number of districts, unless new and special provision against it were made : and no such provision seems to have been thought of or at least proposed. Isolated remonstrance proving vain, recourse was had here and there to resistance by way of appeal to quarter sessions ; but in a majority of instances the magistrates found themselves helpless to afford redress against the literal interpretation of the law which limited the company's charge to a maximum percentage. Confluent murmurs swelled into a volume of popular reproach, which at length it was impossible to disregard. Public meetings passed indignant resolutions, and numerous petitions were presented to Parliament praying that a summary end should be put to further exaction. On sanitary grounds a stir was likewise made for more constant service and a purer supply : and with a view to economy of wholesale cost and management in

detail, various schemes were put about for buying out the companies and centralizing water administration. Towards the close of the session of 1879 Mr. Fawcett moved a resolution pledging the House of Commons to deal effectually with these questions; and on the part of the Government the Home Secretary accepted the duty, acknowledged its urgency, and undertook in the recess to mature a measure that would give Parliament the opportunity without further delay of conferring the control if not the ownership of metropolitan water works upon some competent and responsible public authority. What the nature of that authority should be in each metropolitan city, or whether there should be one only having jurisdiction over all The Ten, the minister did not say. Possibly the Government had not come to any definite conclusion on the matter; and in the absence of popular opinion strongly pronounced on the various alternatives that presented themselves, the mind of a Home Secretary is liable to be swayed more or less unconsciously by the tendencies of bureaucracy which encompass him on every side and that are always in favour of centralization. Mr. E. J. Smith, for many years Receiver for the Northern Estates of the Crown, and one of the permanent surveyors for the Ecclesiastical Commission, a man of great ability and experience, undertook to negotiate the simultaneous purchase of the stock, effects, and tenant right of the eight water companies and the "unification of future supply under Government management." * A report upon the state of the various works, made by Colonel (now Sir Francis) Bolton† as water examiner under the Act of 1871, declared it to be "essential that an abundant supply of water of good quality should be given to the metropolis at the lowest possible cost. The advantages of the service and control of such a supply being vested in one authority only instead of in many were numerous; it being of course intended that this authority should be one that would represent the Government and be responsible to Parliament alone. There was nothing in the character of such an organization that a public authority invested with stringent powers could not administer more efficiently and more economically than it was possible for private associations to do. It being assumed that it was the

* Evidence before Select Committee, July 9, 1880.

† In a confidential letter to E. J. Smith, December 15, 1879.

intention to make the best of the present sources of supply, and to improve them as much as possible, without contemplating any of the projects for a supply from other channels, the immediate results of the transfer would be a considerable reduction of proposed expenditure for new works ; an increase of net income from the consolidation of establishments ; the better collection of rates at a lower percentage ; and the new rates to be received from owners of houses who do not now take water from the companies." *

Here is the stark naked theory of central absorption, as opposed to municipal self-rule, according to the latest version. The consuming (and non-consuming) public were to be alike taken in and done for without consent or opportunity to object, like the ignorant natives of a Polynesian island, or the abject ryots of some newly annexed jaghire of Hindostan. What signify the rights, prejudices, wants, or capacities of four millions of people inhabiting the "province covered with houses" that Sir George Lewis thought it was high time to endue with corporate privileges many years ago? True, they were citizens of no mean cities, that in the last fifty years have sent to Parliament a greater number of eminent men than any twenty towns municipally enfranchised †—true they possess fixed property liable to yearly local taxation greater than all the corporate cities of Yorkshire and Lancashire taken together. True, they include in their muster-roll during more than half the year a large majority of the eminent physicians, advocates, jurists, men of letters, opulent merchants, eminent artists, rich bankers, landed gentry, and hereditary nobles of the realm. The insatiable greed of centralism desires to oust them from the management of their own affairs. What can they know about water or gas compared with half a dozen deputy-assistant commissaries, sitting in big back rooms in Whitehall, with ten times more to do than there are hours in the day to enable a hundred of them to understand it, or days enough in the year to enable them to dispose of it patiently or properly?

Economies in management are the ever-ready pretexts

* Colonel Bolton to E. J. Smith, December 15, 1879.

† Of those who have passed away it is hardly necessary to recall the names of Mr. Grote, Lord Russell, Sir J. Hobhouse, General Evans, Sir F. Burdett, Mr. J. S. Mill, Sir Robert Grant, Dr. Lushington, Sir W. Molesworth, Lord Dudley Stuart, Sir W. Horne, Sir Henry Bulwer, and Admiral Napier.

for unification ; and they seldom fail of producing a superficial effect for the time being on the public mind, generally engrossed with other topics more attractive, and therefore more willingly discussed. One may admit, were it only to save time and inconclusive controversy, that many specious schemes for bungling together, and chopping to a given length undertakings previously distinct, have the merit of immediate saving in some form or other. If all the coal-wharves on the river were taken over by the Home Office, or all the private banks bought up by the Exchequer, or all the bakeries by the Local Government Board, it may be clearly shown that the stupid and brutish inhabitants of London would be benefited by a dead saving of two shillings and a penny a chaldron, half a farthing a loaf, and a sixteenth per cent. gain on discount or deposit. Why not have Government bakeries, coal-wharves, and banks ? or why should not the Admiralty take to penny steamers, reducing the fares, as could be clearly done, to three-farthings, with return tickets to Rosherville Gardens at three halfpence each ? or why should the Committee of Privy Council not go into drugs and patent medicines, beggaring all independent chemists, and guaranteeing a helpless public against adulteration of tonics, and the blundering of apothecaries' boys ? If amalgamation and monopoly did not bait their hook with savings, grubs, and other cheap attraction, foolish gudgeons would never be caught thereby : but how reasoning and reflective creatures of a higher grade of being can be duped is simply astonishing. In the project of a Central Trust for establishing a Government monopoly of water supply to the metropolis, calculations were duly made of all the economies to be affected in stationery, messengers, board-room chairs, wear and tear of bell-pulls, and pensions to decayed clerks by the substitution of three nominees of the Crown for the several boards of directors named by the companies. More edifying still were the portentous calculations of existing reservoirs and filter beds which might be abolished, and similar works in contemplation, the outlay whereon might be spared, with a view to show immediate retrenchment, and a balance in favour of unification in the first two or three years. But what a prospect in the dim perspective ! It is the old story of selling surplus naval or military stores in order to eke out a popular budget, reckless of the certainly

enhanced expenditure when growing exigencies have to be met at no distant day. The select committee to inquire into negotiations for purchase were assured that if the companies were bought out, their disposable property would amount to many hundred thousand pounds, all to the good in the unification balance of profit and loss in the first year or two. And by way of answer to the obvious consideration that steadily extending wants would soon require the repurchase of land at a higher price, and the replacement, at greater cost, of extra filtering beds, there was the cynical suggestion that when all competition was extinguished, and all sense of joint-stock prudence removed, and the whole community left to the experimental discretion of an official bureau, water rental might be raised, by levying the charge indiscriminately on those who consumed and those who did not consume the article in which Government was invited to do a retail trade.

It is sometimes said in an off-hand way, as an excuse for unification, that since the metropolitan area was distributed by Parliament among the water companies, competition has ceased ; and that although a new association might to-morrow ask legislative leave to introduce in Marylebone or Chelsea a fresh source of supply, it would be refused, or the intruding would sooner or later amalgamate with the older company ; and therefore, it is argued that to all intents and purposes competition is out of the question. But this is not wholly true ; competition is good for a great deal more than at first sight appears. As between rival vendors offering to lay connecting pipes from rival mains in the same street, competition may not be probable and certainly cannot be profitable ; but is there no competition working, without noise or haste or failure, between separate companies renting as tenants at will, contiguous water farms within the metropolitan ambit ? Is there no worth in example ; is there no force in comparison ; is there no pressure upon evil or negligent doers accruing from the praise of them that do well ? In a civilized community progressive improvements of the greatest and noblest kind are not carried by jostling, underselling, out-bragging, or countermining. All the finders and sellers of water did not at once, or by concert, begin, far less complete, their costly contrivances for storage and purification ; still less did they simultaneously undertake to raise new capital for the purpose

of sinking artesian wells in remote hills, on the chance of deriving therefrom chemically irreproachable sources of supply. The efforts spontaneously made by the New River, East Kent, and Chelsea companies at different times and in different ways to vindicate their respective positions as purveyors of a great necessary of life were not the mere result of stringent terms imposed upon them by the legislature, or suggested by the sheer expectation of any immediate gain. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have recently been laid out by these and other companies, not with a view of supplanting or injuring one another, but in an honourable spirit of provoking one another to jealousy by good deeds done. It is admitted on all hands that much of this expenditure realized no additional profit in rates, but must be set down to the tentative improvements of the condition and character of each undertaking. What is this but the highest and best species of competition—that sort of competition which, untrammelled by any centralized yoke, has been the spirit and nerve and life of all the great self-reliant enterprises that have made England what she is? Crush out this spirit, buy up competition, trust to royal commissions to discover new fountains, and deputy inspectors to find out flaws in old pipes; sell off reserves of land, and make one filter bed do the work of two (as if it would not get dirty in half the time); make a show, or at least a fuss, about economy to justify expropriation and central monopoly, and we may not have very long to wait for a fresh outbreak of sanitary reproach and protest, that having gone farther we have only fared worse. Daily journalism will wax eloquent and indignant meetings grow stormy; and the Water Trust office will rejoice that the day of reaction has come. Public opinion, out of temper, will be readily taken at its word; unforeseen necessities will remain the excuse for unprecedented expenditure, the burthen will fall exclusively on the Ten Cities of the Thames, and a provisional order to authorize the borrowing of a sum not exceeding so many millions will be carried in a House the bulk of whose members care for none of these things. Opposition will be futile on the second reading, and in committee protesting citizens will be told that *locus standi* they have none. Responsibility to Parliament in a body without equal competitor or rival under such circumstances will prove to be the merest

sham. The temptation to reckless expenditure will neither be curbed by the shareholding interest of a joint-stock company nor the ratepaying interest of a local corporation, nor the union of both in one, as in Manchester or Birmingham.

To do him justice, the late Home Secretary seems to have shrunk from the invidious task of subjecting the property and people of the metropolis to the unbridled rule of a mere government board. If their rates were to be mortgaged for the supposed advantage of buying out the eight companies at a capital sum of thirty-four millions, he felt that they were at least entitled to a representative voice in the management of the affair ; and his bill was therefore framed for the constitution of a hybrid board composed of delegates from the Board of Works and the City Corporation, as well as three functionaries with high salaries named by the Crown. Practically, however, this device would have resulted merely in a consultative body resembling in its inability to originate, veto, or control, the Indian Council whose members are allowed the luxury of dignified discussion in tranquil times, and permitted to explain their ideas in confidential essays when the wind from the east is stormy, but who have no more power to take the reins out of the hands of the Secretary of State than the inside passengers in a mail-coach had to interfere with their driver. On they must go, whatever road he chooses to take, and at whatever pace he chooses to drive, certain only, if they call out of the windows that they are very uneasy, to be jeered at for their pains. As the bill was not discussed before the Dissolution, and was not reintroduced afterwards, it is needless to dwell on its specific characteristics. The report of the select committee points to a different constitution of Metropolitan Water Trust, recommending likewise, indeed, the sending of delegates by the City Corporation and the Metropolitan Board as well as representatives of certain suburban districts not comprehended within the jurisdiction of either ; and omitting all mention of salaried Crown functionaries. Whether these last be added or omitted is a question of secondary importance. That of primary consequence is whether a central Water Trust elective in name or reality must not be regarded as the first story of a unified municipal edifice for the whole of London.

From a return moved for by Lord Stafford,* it appears that six hundred cities and towns in England and Wales depend for their supply of water wholly on the works of private companies or upon these and wells and rivers in each locality, or finally upon the latter only : while a comparatively small number, but chiefly commercial or manufacturing towns, with large populations, rely on their municipal government to furnish them at prime cost with this great necessary of life. The experiments which had been made at Manchester, Glasgow, and other great northern towns in the business of corporate water-finding and water-vending seemed to be successful in the judgment of the communities they exclusively concern ; and it is probable that ere long other towns will seek to follow their example. The select committee on metropolitan supply declare as the result of their investigations that " it is expedient that the supply of water to the metropolis should be placed under the control of some public body which shall represent the interests and command the confidence of the water consumers ; and that in the absence of any single municipal body to which these functions could be committed, a water authority of a representative character should be constituted, and that a bill having that object should be introduced at an early date by her Majesty's Government."

It is to be observed that these recommendations do not necessarily imply the buying out of the existing companies or any of them. The concluding passages of the report significantly intimate that Government would not disfavour the idea of taking over their stock and works if better terms could be made for the public than those which Mr. E. J. Smith sought to impose ; and warning is distinctly given that when the new municipal authority shall be created, Parliament will be quite open to consider the expediency of giving it statutable power, as has been done elsewhere, to go further afield in search of new sources of supply. All such projects, however, were judiciously left to the judgment of the future ; and the primary and pressing consideration for us all just now is the proper constitution of the municipal authority whose duty it would be to enforce adequate and punctual service at reasonable rates by the companies so long as they

* Urban Water Supply in England and Wales, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed July 3, 1879.

exist, or to buy them out and economically to take their places, if reasonable terms can be agreed upon. It will perhaps be time enough to discuss terms for a transfer and sale when the municipal trustees for the community who are to find the money are in a position to make a bidding or to receive one; meanwhile popular consideration had best be concentrated on the exact nature of the trust, and how it ought to be constituted. After all that has happened in the experimental history of metropolitan institutions, it is most desirable that we should have no more transitional expedients in local rule, but that the foundations should be laid whereon we may build permanently and securely not only for the wants of to-day, but for the time to come. To satisfy present weariness and impatience at the unsatisfactory state of things that now exists, it would not be difficult to put together a sub-department of the Local Government Board with a certain number of water trustees elected for form's sake by the people like poor-law guardians to come when summoned, sign their names in a book, listen to orders, and go home again; leaving the whole direction and management of another great branch of local taxation to the Government of the day. We know exactly what this hybrid system of responsibility without power, and power without responsibility, in local affairs comes to. We have seen the experiment tried out thoroughly, and we are now witnessing its results. Guardians of the poor have been gradually but steadily deprived of all power or discretion over the administration of relief; they are reduced to indignity and unimportance. They are representative in nothing any longer but the name; and if to-morrow the sham were swept away by an unpublished edict from Whitehall, neither rate-payers nor paupers would be conscious of the difference in any practical respect whatever.

It would be equally easy, were it thought politic, to create another central board by way of election, to whom might be confided the absolute control and guidance in all matters connected with water consumption and water supply. The Board of Works is such a body, and two years ago it was not only willing to undertake the task, but it actually went to great expense and trouble to lay before Parliament its views and calculations on the subject. From instinct not to be mistaken, though not easily to be explained, Parliament shied

and could never be brought to look at the first fence again. The Board of Works dropped the proposal quietly ; and when subsequently asked if there was any notion of renewing it, assurances were given that the Board "had put away ambition." But what does all this mean? It is no secret that Parliament begins to think central authority has quite enough to do, and quite enough of power to do it. What is really wanted is the like local authority in each of our ten metropolitan towns to that which exists in each of the other great cities of the kingdom.





